



What future for allotments in the Wakefield District?

June 2015

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Whilst we have tried our best to report accurately, any errors are ours alone.

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Glossary

ADI	Allotment Development Initiative (formerly ARI)
ALMO	Arms Length Management Organisation
APSE	Association for Public Service Excellence
ARI	Allotments Regeneration Initiative (now ADI)
BCEP	Bradford Community Environment Project
BFAHS	Barnet Federation of Allotment and Horticultural Societies
FGIS	Food Growing in Schools
H&W	Health and Wellbeing
IEW	Incredible Edible Wakefield
IPS	Independent & Provident Society
LDAGF	Leeds District Allotment Gardeners Federation
LGA	Local Government Association
NAS	National Allotment Society (formerly known as NSALG)
NE	Natural England
NEF	New Economics Foundation
NHS	National Health Service
NSALG	National Society for Allotment-holders and Leisure Gardeners (Now NAS)
TMO	Tenant Management Organisation
VCS	Voluntary and community sector

1. Background to the study

1.1 Value of allotments

Allotments are, for many of us, the source of great good. The main point of allotmenting is the produce: nothing beats eating your own fresh-picked fruit and vegetables, as celebrated by numerous celebrity chefs including Jamie Oliver and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall. It can also bring financial benefits to a household: Walne (2011) reckons growing your own food can reduce your annual food bill by £1,300.

The NAS claims that a quarter of people go to their allotment to socialise as well as grow food (www.nsalg.org.uk). Indeed, allotments can be havens of community cohesion, where people from all backgrounds and (increasingly) a variety of ages come to work. They are great levelers, where success is judged on what you grow, not on who you are. Some sites have a great social buzz about them, with community barbeques and other events through the seasons.

It is widely recognised that children can benefit hugely from growing their own food. They gain a fundamental appreciation of where food comes from, along with improved personal and physical development and, of course, enthusiasm for eating what they have grown. There is growing evidence that working outdoors improves academic achievements inside the classroom. There are direct academic learning opportunities in such areas as geography, science, numeracy and literacy - but also transferable skills like team work, problem solving, building self esteem and enterprise. Additional benefits for schools/youth groups can include improved family and business involvement and stronger communities (see www.rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening and FGIS 2012 p 6).

Allotments are also an important aspect of sustainable living for those who do not have big gardens of their own for growing food. They enable people to make choices about using chemicals, composting and recycling materials. Food security is of increasing concern for many, and growing your own means you know exactly what has gone into (and/or onto) your food, and where it has come from. Food miles are minimised, packaging unnecessary: a household's carbon footprint is reduced. The social make-up of plot-holders increasingly includes the 'eco' or 'green' members of our society.

Allotment sites also have wildlife value, contributing to the 'green lungs' of the city and providing a ready larder for bees, butterflies and birds. Plants and animals that struggle to survive on intensively managed farmland thrive here (NE 2007 p 2).

Economic regeneration can also be supported by allotment gardening. Horticulture is an important industry, worth £9 billion in the UK economy, and employing around 300,000 people. The RHS and partners are campaigning for improved routes into careers at all levels in the sector, highlighting the fact that 70% of businesses in the sector struggle to recruit skilled workers (Horticulture Matters industry group 2014).

1.2 Health benefits

Health benefits from allotments are massive. Evidence is accumulating to demonstrate the value of exercise in nature, or 'green exercise'. The analysis by Barton and Pretty (2010, p 3947) in particular shows there are 'large benefits' from even short engagements, leading to 'positive short and long-term health outcomes'. An allotment is just like a 'green gym' - 30 minutes of gardening can burn around 150 calories, the same as low impact aerobics (www.nsalq.org.uk)! Planting and weeding constitute this kind of activity. If you did this five times per week, you'd reach the NHS guideline of 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity. This will reduce risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and help maintain a healthy weight. Such activity makes you feel warmer, breathe harder and your heart beat faster - and, in addition, it reduces symptoms of depression and anxiety (NHS n.d.). And there are often harder work jobs to do on the plot - like digging, mowing, sawing and turning compost - which will bring even more benefits. And it is evident that older people often continue gardening long after they would have given up other physical activities - so allotmenting will keep you fitter for longer.

Mental ill health affects one in four adults in England in any one year, estimated to cost £105 billion per year (Mind 2013), and 'ecotherapy' (which is a more structured intervention than general gardening, though gardening is a key constituent) is accessible, non-threatening and attracting those who would not otherwise engage with other mental health approaches. It is particularly useful for those many older people who do not feel comfortable with 'talking' therapies.

In their analysis of how to achieve wellbeing, Aked et al (2011, p 17) state: *'Having strong social relationships, being physically active and being involved in learning are all important influencers of both well-being and ill-being.'*

This is exactly what allotments can offer. In a similar vein, the National Trust goes so far as to term the potential of gardens as a 'Natural Health Service', promoting physical and mental wellbeing. They even recommend investment in them as a way to improve the health of the nation (NT 2009 p 27).

Guidance by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) is encouraging GPs and Community Nurses to refer patients to outdoor activity sessions to improve their wellbeing (quoted in NE 2009 p 11). Increasing activity levels could even save the NHS an estimated £2.1 billion per year (ibid p 8). Public Health Departments in some authorities support allotment/gardening projects: they may be a cost-effective way to reduce health costs.

Health in Wakefield is generally worse than the England average, with significant inequalities: 9.1 years less life expectancy for men in the most deprived areas compared to those in the least deprived areas, and 7.7 years for women. Compared to national figures, there are higher rates of early death from heart disease, stroke and cancer. Wakefield also has worse rates of people claiming incapacity benefits for mental illness, drug misuse and diabetes. Deprivation is higher than average, with 21.4% of children living in

poverty. The district's health priorities include improving mental wellbeing and increasing physical activity (Public Health England 2014).

Wakefield Council is committed to improving the health and wellbeing of its population, and has set up a Health and Wellbeing (H&W) Board to oversee this. Priorities identified in their Strategy for 2013-16 (Wakefield Council 2013a) include reducing the health inequalities in the district, encouraging healthier lifestyle choices, promoting positive mental health, trying to prevent long-term conditions/intervene early and then enabling management of them to maintain quality of life. Older people and young children are highlighted as particularly important.

Wakefield Together's district plan (2012 p 19) similarly includes a commitment to reducing health inequalities through community led approaches to improve health and lifestyles, as well as targeted activity programmes to reduce obesity and improve life quality for those with long term health conditions. There is also a commitment to promote leisure facilities for health and wellbeing.

Recognising the challenges ahead, the District Plan confirms 'co-ordinated work with the third sector will help ensure our communities and citizens are more self-reliant and resilient to future economic shocks and ongoing challenges'. (ibid p 24). It seems any VCS organisation bidding to take on a service may be pushing at an open door!



1.3 Incredible Edible Wakefield (IEW)

IEW is a social enterprise and Company Limited by Guarantee registered with Companies House since April 2012. It was originally established as a small community group in 2010 in Horbury but has grown to become a district wide, volunteer led social enterprise (IEW n.d. (a) & (c)).

Social Enterprise UK defines a social enterprise as a business that trades to tackle social problems, improve communities, people's life chances, or the environment. They make their money from selling goods and services in the

open market, but they reinvest their profits back into the business or the local community.

As a social enterprise, Incredible Edible Wakefield's social mission is to develop initiatives which inspire groups and individuals to participate in growing, rearing, sourcing and distributing local food and by doing so to help to provide access to good, local food for everyone living in and around the Wakefield district.

IEW is also part of a movement of Incredible Edible groups across the world. The UK network has more than 50 independent groups and the worldwide network stretches from Canada to New Zealand. Despite sharing the Incredible Edible name, groups have no legal relationship with each other or the original Incredible Edible group in Todmorden. What groups do share is a drive to provide access to good local food for all.

IEW is owned by its membership, currently comprising eighty members, each either renting a mini-plot or just interested in local food issues in the district. It currently has five directors, four unpaid and one paid - for project work only.

All four directors are drawn from the membership and the communities served by IEW. One has been there since registration with Companies House, three others were selected during 2013, and the last one in October 2014. As of its last filed accounts (April 2014), its net worth was £18,863 - a very small company (www.companycheck.co.uk). Turnover in 2013/14 was £35,316 (IEW 2014a).

The range of work done by IEW is astonishing given its limited resources, and includes working with schools, establishing edible gardening clubs, renting out mini-plots and supporting other food growing related activities. Its lively website is packed with information about growing and food in Wakefield including interactive maps. Between April 2013 and March 2014 it received over 56,000 hits. There is also a popular Facebook page and well-used Twitter account. Over 700 people and organisations regularly receive e-newsletters.

IEW has established strong partnerships in its short life, working with a range of organisations including South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, Wakefield Council, Wakefield District Housing, NOVA, Groundwork Trust and numerous schools, churches and community centres around the district. In the year up to March 2014, they made 740 personal contacts with people via growing sessions, walks, talks, demonstrations and stalls. They have created over 60 mini allotment plots across six different locations across the district and in 2015 will be running weekly edible gardening clubs at six separate sites.

The Health and Wellbeing impact of IEW's work has been evaluated via consultant-led interviews and case studies, and these show participants not only experienced a range of health benefits but were able to sustain and add to the improvements in the medium and long term (IEW n.d.(a)).



IEW commissioned the present study as a result of its ongoing involvement with allotments in the district. Passionate about encouraging food growing and rooted in its community, it was well placed to explore the views of local plot-holders in the context of the pressures on local government.

1.4 Wakefield Council's Allotments Service

Most of Wakefield's allotments are managed by the Estates section of the Council's Street Scene Services. The service lies within Regeneration and Economic Growth. Other sites in the district are managed by town or parish councils - e.g. Ackworth Parish Council, Hemsworth Town Council - and five sites are run by Wakefield District Housing. We are here only concerned with the Council-run sites, of which there are, according to the Council, 59 - although IEW's assessments indicate there are actually 68, with some given over to woods, meadows or playing fields.

The Council has both statutory and temporary sites, the former being fairly well protected under national law, and the latter being destined eventually for some other use. There are a total of 1830 plots under Council management, and, as of January 2013, a waiting list of 724. This means 40 people are waiting per 100 plots, which is relatively low compared to the national average of 52 (Campbell & Campbell 2013). Other data (Appendix A) has a smaller total waiting list figure (567), but Campbell & Campbell's is used here to enable comparison with other authorities. From their figures, Bradford had an apparently massive 130 people waiting per 100 plots, Hull (with a similar number of plots as Wakefield) had 63, Bristol had 61, though Sheffield had only 32.

Allotment rent depends on which tariff band the site falls into - Band A was 21p per square metre during the year 2012/13, B was 17p, and C was 12p.

The bands corresponded to different standards and facilities on the sites, though these are now much more similar. The middle rate was the norm. Rents range from £8 to £80, though the average is £20-£40 (plus water charges where water is available on site). A 50% discount is available for pensioners or those receiving benefits relating to disability. One third of plot-holders claim the discount. 4% of plots do not provide an income due to being vacant or 'unusable', meaning a loss of potential income of £3,000 (Wakefield Council 2013c). See Section 2.4 below for the Council's response to this issue.

There are two part-time allotment officers who carry out the annual inspections.

In line with other authorities, Wakefield is now dividing plots into half plots to make them more manageable for people with busy lifestyles. There are even some quarter plots on a couple of sites.

Until recently, the Council also had an allotments working group, consisting of the allotment officers working with several councilors. This group produced the new Allotments Policy (Wakefield Council 2013c).

Wakefield Council's allotment rules, published in their handbook (which links closely to the Policy), are in line with those of other allotment-holding councils. 60% of the total area must be used to cultivate fruit and vegetables. Sites are normally inspected annually. New plot-holders are expected to make progress within 3 months and have the plot in a 'good state' by the end of the first year (Wakefield Council 2014 pp 6-7). Tyres and carpets are not allowed (p 17). Limited livestock is allowed - up to 8 hens and 8 rabbits per plot-holder, and pigeons only with written permission from the Council (p 30). Plot-holders' responses to this are considered below (Section 2.4).

Most allotment sites are small, with fewer than 20 plots (29 sites - IEW 2014 (c)). Just 2 sites have over 100 plots.

2. Drivers for this study

2.1 National agendas

The Government clearly acknowledges the value of these oases in our cities and towns:

'Allotments are valuable green spaces and community assets providing people with the opportunity to grow their own produce as part of the long-term promotion of environmental sustainability, health and well-being, community cohesion and social inclusion.' (Bradley 2012 p 4)

It is also keen to speed up the time taken for plot allocation, and to make new sites available to prospective growers. Despite this clear commitment, it is disappointing to see that few - or no - resources have followed. In fact, quite the reverse is happening, following the economic downturn and need to cut costs - and choices made under the ideology of the Big Society.

The Localism Act 2011, including in its agenda the Right to Challenge, has changed the relationship of local communities with their public service providers, opening up opportunities for new and different ways to deliver services.

The housing sector has been a pioneer of localism, with tenants of social housing having a much greater role in managing their homes and determining how services are provided to their blocks or estates. As early as 2002, tenants have had the Right to Manage. There are various models by which to do this, including Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) and Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs). Both are not-for-profit, with residents remaining secure tenants of the Council, which in turn maintains ownership of the housing stock. Alongside this, in 2012, central government subsidy for housing was abolished, leaving councils (or their agents) with all the income from housing rent, to invest as they please.

Under the Right to Manage regulations, tenants are supported to set up incorporated bodies (IPS or other constituted body - see Section 4.3 below) which are independent entities and which can employ staff/contractors, take on any or all of a range of services from day to day repairs to rent collection and chasing arrears.

ALMOs and TMOs claim to have made significant savings since their establishment, while at the same time to increasing expenditure and improving services. They may also be eligible for grants and/or additional funds (i.e. Community Cashback - savings from delivering a council service more cheaply, or Decent Homes funding from central government). See www.almos.org.uk and www.nftmo.com for further details of how these forms of devolved housing management work.

There are of course also critics of these regimes. They claim that worse conditions of service and pay rates have led to a higher staff turnover, and that these apparently progressive moves are actually a stepping stone to transferring the social housing stock out of Council hands.

Whatever, where housing led the 'revolution', it seems possible that allotments could follow.

2.2 Wakefield Council

The Council and its partners in Wakefield Together (NHS, Police, Housing) are committed to make localism work, and is keen to engage communities in new/different arrangements for service delivery (Wakefield Together 2012 pp 13-14). They are also aware of the talents of the Third Sector and how they may better deliver local services.

Local councils are facing major cuts - the Office for Budget Responsibility calculates that spending on general council services (i.e. excluding protected areas like health) will fall from £3,020 per person in 2009-10 to £1,290 by

2019-20, which is a fall of 57.3% (quoted 18/12/14 at www.bbc.co.uk). Wakefield Council's net General Fund Revenue budget for 2014/15 was reduced by £65m. The announcement by Kris Hopkins MP (18/12/14) on budget cuts for 2015-16 gives Wakefield Council's reduction in spending power as £5.835m or 2%, although this does not reflect the true scale of cuts, according to the LGA (www.theguardian.com). The Council has already made savings of £81 million in the last four years, and are facing cuts of £38m next year. Council Leader Cllr Peter Box admitted (18/12/14) that the authority ...

'... cannot absorb further cuts in spending without this having a significant and noticeable impact on the services we provide' (www.wakefield.gov.uk).

The Council is dealing with budget cuts by becoming a 'Catalyst Council':

'We will continue to support directly provided services, but recognise that in the future we will deliver fewer services ourselves' (Wakefield Council 2011).

This will, they assert,

'ensure we get full value for Wakefield citizens for every penny we spend' (Wakefield Together 2012 p 30).

They intend to adopt a flexible approach leaving scope for negotiation from organisations bidding to deliver services. Allotments were included in the list of services to be considered for contracting out (Wakefield Council 2011 p 13).

If there were any offer to provide a better service currently provided by the Council more cheaply, this could prove popular!

2.3 Situation in other authorities

The LGA has for some years flagged up the challenges faced by allotments. Rents have long been too low to even cover admin costs, and capital spending has reduced substantially. They need to have a sustainable financial base - but there is no easy answer as to how to achieve this (*Growing in the Community 2nd edition* 2008 p 5).

APSE's latest survey of local authorities' allotment services (2013 p 6) showed that the average budget for development dropped from £34,373 in 2008 to £4,072 in 2013. Yet plot holders' rents have significantly increased in recent years: in 2011-12, the most common cost band for a standard allotment was £31-£40 (23%), whereas for 2013-14 it was £41-£50 (21%). Along with rents, facilities have also increased, i.e. 35% of sites had community rooms/huts in 2013 compared to 23% in 2008, and 28% had toilet facilities compared to 17% in 2008.

Several authorities no longer run their own allotment service. A trawl of the internet shows that Laing, latterly Carillion, run Hounslow's allotments, forming part of a larger package including parks and open spaces, fly tipping and graffiti removal. Similarly, Balfour Beatty Workplace Ltd, now bought out and trading as Cofely, are 'regeneration partners' to North East Lincolnshire

Council. They have a 10 year contract to manage £155M-worth of former Council services, including asset management, highways, regeneration - including allotments. For some years, Amey partnered the Council to form Enterprise Peterborough, who ran the allotments there. The allotments have now have returned to Council management.

Instead of a big organisation, there is much enthusiasm in some quarters for plot-holders to take on management. For example, Richard Wiltshire's comprehensive examination of devolved management (1998 pp 4-5) makes the point that there is no agency better placed to reverse the downward slide of allotments and tackle vacancies than the plot-holders themselves. Management by tenants will also clearly help cut costs - but there are pitfalls, which can be summarised as commitment, capacity and accountability (see section 4.2 below).

In Blackpool, the Federation of Allotment Associations has run all 7 sites since 2012 (see <http://www.bfaa.btck.co.uk>). There was already a strong federation in place, negotiations took 2 years to complete, and the Council improved all sites before handing them over to the Federation. Their lease is for 25 years. The allotment community is small, long-established and committed, and people know each other well, which facilitates smooth operation. For outsiders such as prospective plot-holders, however, the website is extremely unwelcoming and even incomprehensible in parts. There is no map showing sites, no way to contact for the Fed reps for each site, and dire warnings not to use social media 'to cause problems'.

The London Borough of Barnet provides an interesting example of how self management can work successfully. There are 44 Council-owned allotment sites with over 3000 plot-holders, and, until recently the Council offered three models of management. The first was where the association collected rent and maintained the site, and paid 50% of the rent to the Council. This was on a short lease basis (6 years, usually renewed at expiry). The second was direct letting from the Council, which retained responsibility for most things apart from some minor repairs/improvements. The third model was in between, with the society collecting rent, keeping 25% of it in return for plot allocations and minor works, but they had no legal liabilities.

The Barnet Federation of Allotment and Horticultural Societies (BFAHS) was established in 1965. From 2006, BFAHS was in discussion with the Council with regards taking on the management of the whole allotments portfolio, which had been left to slide downhill, as was happening in many other authorities. The estimated cost for completing the backlog of necessary work was £1M. BFAHS was offering to take on the service, and to then sub-let sites to individual associations using the same models described above, planning to reduce their input over a 5 year period as associations took on more responsibility. By 2010, the Council was unwilling to grant a lease for this arrangement and negotiations ground to a halt.

Barnet Council then undertook to negotiate individual leases with societies. However, all the individual societies opted to do this via BFAHS. Thus BFAHS was able to offer guidance and support, and all 37 societies now fully manage their own sites (and in several cases, neighbouring smaller sites), and all have 38 year leases. BFAHS led negotiations on the model lease, dealt with all legal issues, and provided community development support for the societies to be ready to take on the significant new responsibilities. The associations were fortunate in having amongst their membership volunteers who were willing and able to take on the required tasks. For a fuller description of this process, see BFAHS's website - www.barnetalotments.org.uk and BCEP (2013, Appendix 1).



Leeds allotments have also been working towards increasing self management as a way to reduce the £133K subsidy for allotment provision claimed by the Council. Two thirds of their 97 sites are already self-managed to differing degrees, and retain a percentage (67%) of the rent in return. The long-established Leeds Federation (LDAGF) has been working with the Council's Parks and Countryside allotments officer for many years. They were looking to explore alternative management models for allotments, and have started consultations on this. In the meantime they are also campaigning against dramatic rent increases proposed by the Council, and for longer leases and to maintain the current levels of rent retained by self managed sites (see www.ldgf.org.uk). The battle has been intense, and in 2014 made it as far as the High Court (see Yorkshire Evening Post 6/8/14). The adversarial attitude of the Council is making a positive way forward working jointly with LDAGF less viable.

Bradford recently completed a pre-feasibility study concerning the future of allotment provision, with 3 models to consider - staying as things are, sites taking on increased management (i.e. plot allocation, possibly other duties too), but no financial responsibilities, or full self management. There are already some parish/town councils, and a couple of IPS which manage themselves in Bradford district, however there were few of the 13 associations willing or able to take on many additional duties (BCEP 2013). However, one has since applied to take on a full site management lease.

It is interesting to note that Worcester Allotments Forum have similarly been debating how to manage sites. When given the same 3 models to consider as Bradford, two thirds of plot-holders from the 25 sites voted to remain under Council control, though requested improved co-operation from the Council and better communication (Worcester Observer 20/3/14). These clearly cautious plot-holders can see the responsibility that comes with the power to manage!

2.4 Current local situation with regards allotments

An audit of the quality of greenspace in the district was undertaken in 2010 using a methodology based on that used to judge applications for the Green Flag Award. The Council's 57 allotment sites received an average quality score of 32% which equates to poor quality. (Wakefield Council 2015)

Among plot-holders, satisfaction with the service remains low, with common complaints of site repairs taking too long, poor facilities on site, no skips provided for waste removal and slow turnover of vacant plots.

In November 2013, needing to reduce costs and aiming to make the service 'cost neutral', Wakefield Council's Cabinet met to discuss allotments. This meeting made three important decisions: it adopted the aforementioned Allotments Policy, it agreed to spend £65K on improvements to allotment sites, and to increase plot rental rates to 22.5p per square metre, maintaining concession rates of 50% for those eligible (Wakefield Council 2013b).

The Allotments Policy had been approved and implemented with no consultation with those it affected, the plot-holders. Yet it included significant changes to what tenants were and were not allowed to do on their plots. New rules related to a huge range of aspects: ducks, dogs, bonfires, percentage to be cultivated, the nature of fencing/sheds (Wakefield Council 2013(c)). Previously, plot-holders had been left very much to themselves, and plenty of leeway was allowed in the interpretation of tenancy agreements. Some plots were used for businesses, e.g. pig rearing or horse trading, sometimes handed down through generations. All the new rules were duties of the tenants, nothing was demanded from the Council. Although broadly comparable to the rules in other authorities, the new policy was seen by many tenants as draconian and one-sided.

The increase in the rental costs was reckoned sufficient to cover the estimated £77k cost of the allotment service. Previously, the annual shortfall had been £17k or more (Wakefield Council 2013b).

Plot-holders are thus facing huge hikes in the cost of their plots, some looking at a 40% increase in 2015-16 (Yorkshire Evening Post 26/11/13). This follows quickly on the heels of a rise in water charges: a flat rate of £10 was payable until 2012/13, which apparently left the Council with a need to substantially subsidise the water bill (Wakefield Council 2013b). To fully cover the cost, this rate was increased to £20.92 for a full plot or £10.46 per half plot in 2013/14.

The £65k of improvements therefore had the air of a sweetener, to offset the bad feeling engendered by the new rules and higher rental costs.



Supporting the Council's Allotments Office, there is also a 'representative' on most sites. This person sometimes - but not always - doubles as secretary if there is an association on site. Their role seems to be mainly to show prospective tenants around the site, though individual reps interpret it in their own way.

The Council's Allotments Policy states:

'Most sites have an elected Site Secretary who carries out a range of duties set out in the terms of an agreement in return for a cash sum from Wakefield Council' (Wakefield Council 2013c p 3).

However where there is no association or committee, which is the majority of sites, this is clearly not the case as there is no one to elect a representative and so the rep is merely chosen from the plot-holders with no appointment procedure or democratic election.

Despite this most site reps seem to do a good job, with little support or communication from the Council and for very little financial return. However where there are problems there is no management structure or performance management - and therefore no accountability.

3. Moving forward

3.1 Stakeholders' views

In early 2014, IEW obtained funding to explore the views of plot-holders on Wakefield Council's allotment sites and other interested parties. This was done via public meetings and questionnaires.

During September and October 2014, nine open evenings were held in different locations near clusters of allotment sites, during which opinions were canvassed about an improved allotment service for the district. These stakeholder engagement meetings would also inform a review of the recently introduced Allotments Policy, which had not found favour in all quarters.

The meetings were all advertised locally via allotments contacts and other networks and the Council helped publicising these by sending out a notice to every plot holder. The meetings were generally well attended, with between 8 and 40 people present at each. Although the meetings were open to any interested parties, it appears that all present were allotment-holders or accompanying someone who was.

A comprehensive questionnaire, based on that designed by the National Allotment Society, was used at the meetings to gain a picture of whom the plot-holders are, and what are the desired changes and improvements. The questionnaire also functioned to stimulate engagement with a vision for an improved service.

Information from these questionnaires has been compiled by IEW and is presented in summary form in Appendix B. Of the total 197 completed questionnaires, 141 were from Council-run sites, and it is these on which we will focus here. Responses came from 38 different sites, possibly more as 20 questionnaire respondents did not give their site. IEW has done extremely well to get such a good sample, and responses from such an extensive range of sites.

The questionnaires show that the Council's allotment community appears to conform to traditional expectations, being predominantly male (68%) and over 55 years of age (69%). All respondents live within five miles of their plot, over half (54%) within one mile. 85% took on their allotment because they enjoy gardening, 68% because they wanted to grow healthy food, and 47% to get exercise. Even though not all tenants took on plots for exercise, a massive 98% of respondents say they exceed government recommendations for weekly physical activity levels. 39% are relative newcomers, having had their plot for less than 5 years, though 22% have had one for more than 20 years. Most people (60%) are aware of the new Allotments Policy, although 77% have not read the Allotments Handbook.

Most people (90%) are on their first choice of site, and 76% had to wait less than a year to get a plot. Most plots were taken on in a poor condition (74%), and even more (77%) said there were unwanted structures and rubbish on the plot.

There is significant dissatisfaction with the Council's service. 60% said they had to make a few attempts to contact the Allotments Office by phone - or had even given up. Of the 33 people who had received a 'Bad Cultivation' or warning letter, 29 felt it was not deserved. The new Allotments Policy includes an unpopular clause that any new structures on a plot must be commercially produced. 81% of respondents disagreed with this regarding fences, and 73% regarding buildings. Approximately half said existing fences and buildings were non-standard - and 64% said they would not have been able to afford a commercial fence or building. After all, structures made from scraps of recycled material are, to some of us, part of the joy of allotment sites, showing the resourcefulness and creativity of the tenant!

The questionnaires asked about tenants' top 5 priorities for improvements on their sites. Rubbish disposal was most often mentioned (72%), followed by clearing overgrown plots (54%), controlling pests (48%). Other popular improvements were fencing repairs (40%), toilets (37%) and quicker plot allocations (38%).

The whole process has enabled IEW to produce an informed list of recommendations for the Council, see Appendix C.

3.2 Site surveys

Alongside gathering the views of stakeholders, IEW felt it important to gauge the state of the portfolio of Wakefield Council allotments. They thus undertook indicative surveys of all 66 sites under Council management, including those that are now unused or used as playing fields. The findings have been compiled by IEW and are available in Appendix A.

The discrepancy with regards how many sites the Council has creates a confused picture. They claim they have 59, however there are more than that on their own map, for example two part-cultivated sites in Upton, two more in Pontefract - also apparently cultivated. IEW lists a further 9 sites, though 5 are definitely unused or a school field, and another 4 appear to be at least part cultivated. It is admitted that data is unfortunately not always consistent across all IEW spreadsheets, however the broad picture is clear.

In the absence of an active site rep, IEW relied on known contacts, plot-holders working on site or people attending the meetings to invite them onto many sites. Google Maps was the only way to see into four sites. On two sites, plots were individually locked so only very limited access was possible.

There is a waiting list for all but three sites, the longest wait being for prospective allotment holders in Ossett, where there are 98 on the list for a total of just 40 full and 25 half plots. IEW calculate that, across the district, there is one person waiting for every 3 plots. This is not too far from the figure, arrived at using different data, of one person for every 2.5 plots indicated by Campbell & Campbell (2013).

In terms of site infrastructure, almost half of the sites (27) were found to have 'no', 'bad' or 'terrible' fencing, and 10 'poor gates' or 'no gate at all'. 10 sites have 'no water', plus one not known. Where water is available, most sites (22) have a ratio of 5 plots per standpipe, and just 9 sites more than 10 per standpipe. Seven have 30% of plots more than 25m away from a standpipe. Just 5 or 6 have a toilet, and 4 or 5 a trading post. This means very few are well-developed sites.



It appears livestock is kept on the vast majority of the sites: mostly hens (44 sites), but also pigeons (23), ducks/geese (20), horses/ponies (13) as well as pigs, goats, and even cockerels on some. The questionnaires show that 50% of respondents disagree with the new policy of only 8 rabbits and 8 hens - little wonder, as it would mean a significant change in current practice. No bees are allowed, although 20% of respondents say they would like to keep them.

3.3 Wakefield's allotment associations

IEW's survey showed that only six or seven sites definitely have associations, and 2 are not known. That is a tiny number, even if both unknowns turn out to have them. Of these, 2 associations are on the largest 2 sites. 40 sites have 'secretaries'. It is assumed that most of these will be appointees of the Council rather than association secretaries - sometimes called site representatives; the terms seem to be used interchangeably. And indeed, some association secretaries are also appointed as reps as well.

Despite the lack of associations in the district, there seems to be a will to contribute to them. On sites with no association, 70 respondents (58%)

thought the site would benefit from one, and 60% would join one if present. 54% said they would help maintain their site through an association or committee.

The questionnaires indicate that people recognise that an association could apply for external funding for the site (68%), and most (57%) thought that it should receive a share of the plot fees in return for its work. Over 40% said it could also allocate and terminate plots, carry out inspections and rent out power tools and run a trading post. However, it must be noted that tenants' opinions were divided as to whether inspections should be carried out by the site rep (48 people), site committee (23) or the Allotments Officer (46).

During the period of this study, fourteen sites showed interest in setting up new associations in addition to the six sites which already have them, and four sites seemed happy with the status quo. The majority of other sites were either too small to merit an association of their own or were not engaged in the process, with one other site being anti-association due to feeling poorly-supported when they had made a previous attempt at setting one up.

Perhaps related to this is the strong support for an allotment federation to represent allotment holders in the district: 69% of respondents, plus another 24% who would 'possibly' like to see this happen.

In August 2014, the Council's Street Scene Estates canvassed opinions of tenants on a small number of sites concerning forming associations, possibly with Council help in developing a constitution and general advice. Two of these sites (Dewsbury Road, Woodcock Street) are quite developed sites with trading posts and social events during the year. Woodcock St also hosts the Council's flagship allotment, complete with eco-hut and toilet. It may be that the Council sees these four sites as potential pilot schemes where the associations would undertake some/additional management duties. The Council are also insistent that this is just consultation, and does not reflect any firm plans at this stage.

Incredible Edible Wakefield have also put together guides to setting up an Allotment Association which are available to any sites in the district and are also giving support to some sites considering becoming Associations.

4. Where next?

4.1 Options

For social housing tenants, the Right to Manage Regulations 2012 streamlined the process of taking on management responsibilities, and clarified what the organisation needs to do to demonstrate it is competent to do so. This clearly structured process - which seems to have had a good success rate - could be utilised as a blueprint for allotment associations (NFTMO n.d. pp 9-12). It is recognised that setting up is a long term project rather than a quick fix, and that no two are the same. Before embarking upon this process, tenants need to consider carefully if they have got the time, energy and commitment to make it work.

Following the model of social housing tenants, an allotment association deciding to progress down the route towards self management must be genuinely representative of those on the site - it would be essential to get as many plot-holders as possible on board. It also makes sense to have the Council on board as a positive supporter of the initiative - without this good relationship, the process will clearly struggle.

Wiltshire & Burn (2008 p 17) categorise the levels of autonomy available to associations as dependence (little more than exchange of information through a site rep), participation (minor maintenance works, allotments forum), delegation (formal responsibility for a range of duties in return for a proportion of rental income), and semi-autonomy (the association leases the site and carries out all duties, with periodic review with the Council). It can be suggested that Wakefield allotments are currently at the most basic level, and would need major community development work to move to the next level.

Most examples seen in the course of this study show that semi-autonomy is the route taken by most authorities in conjunction with the local associations, as in Barnet. Barnet's main advantage was having a well established and committed Federation (BFAHS) to support and oversee the process, which otherwise could have resulted in very poor outcomes for most sites. They also had one third of sites with already-established societies who collected rents and evicted non-cultivators. To follow this model in Wakefield would require considerable capacity building amongst Wakefield allotment associations and even more development work on sites where there isn't one.

Another route would be for an outside independent organisation to take on the whole Council allotments portfolio, as Carillion has done in Hounslow. It need not be a private company: managing all Blackpool's sites, their Federation of Allotment Associations is a non-profit example. They negotiated a particularly good start with the Council: sites were all brought up to standard before the Federation took on the management. In the current economic climate, this is unlikely to happen in Wakefield. The size of Blackpool's allotment portfolio (just 7 sites) is also significantly smaller and consequently much easier to manage.

Within the Wakefield district, Normanton Town Council run their own 8 allotment sites. The Allotments Committee oversees them, and, although it has no delegated powers from the Town Council, holds regular meetings with site Secretaries. Any issues arising in between meetings such as complaints or evictions are dealt with by a Sub-Committee made up of councillors only (see www.normantontowncouncil.co.uk). Allotment rents are low here, approximately half of the Wakefield price.



4.2 Risks

The level of responsibility for volunteers in self-managed systems is huge. Best practice is, as Wiltshire asserts (1998 p 9), the highest level of autonomy that can be sustained by plot-holders on each site, and this mode should be individually identified in negotiation with the Council. However, the low starting point for Wakefield sites with regards associations/ committees and self management must be acknowledged. With as few as only six, or even (as suggested by the Council) 12 associations existing, it would be a steep learning curve. For comparison, Leeds has 97 sites but 60 of these are already self-managed, and many have been so for thirty years or more.

The only way to accomplish an advancement of autonomy would be slow, painstaking capacity building. Shifts to higher levels could be facilitated over time.

The true level of enthusiasm for self management in Wakefield is difficult to gauge, it is easy for people to 'have their say' on how things are run, but actually running them is a different matter altogether. Plot-holders will expect a service at least as good, if not better, than they got from the Council, and will expect speedy responses, fair treatment and correct handling of funds.

Professionalism can be seen as aloof/ overbearing/ elitist (Wiltshire 1998 p 6). Changes in personnel/ ageing/ other changes within association committees can affect the commitment of volunteers, particularly, for example, when the inevitable happens:

'Initial enthusiasm flags, criticisms accumulate, and apathy (sometimes induced by success) traps office holders in "irreplaceable" positions'.
(Wiltshire 1998 pp 11-12)

Some sites are too small for an association, or they may just not be able to get one going for some reason. There will need to be some way to manage them without disadvantage.

Disputes between committee/ plot-holders or about policy, and accountability will doubtless happen, and provision needs to be made for this, perhaps by using a federation or other independent body as mediator. Then of course the fear of being sued is of concern. The author was told by someone from another authority that

'You hear real cases of people successfully suing local authorities for accidents on allotments, that you would have thought would go against common sense' (private correspondence)

Insurance is becoming compulsory on allotments in some authorities. NAS offers a good insurance deal to associations, although NAS membership is charged per plot-holder, which can seem expensive. This, or similar, would be better charged as part of the rental, to remove the element of choice.

If the process goes to tender, some other agent may come in and charge less to run the service, but they may have little or no appreciation of the importance of allotments.

Despite national and local policy decisions, some council departments are not actually keen to lose services they currently deliver, and can prove to be difficult/ obstinate/ awkward negotiators, as shown in several examples in this study.

4.3 Other issues to consider

Barnet Federation (BFAHS) noted difficulties in their process as being negotiating a long enough lease term, appropriate management responsibilities and minimising the potential for Council interference, essential H&S repairs and the Council's willingness to undertake these, Council maintaining riparian responsibilities and delays in the process due to how Councils work. All are important lessons from which to learn. There is also the serious issue of societies lacking management experience. Wiltshire warns (1998 p 11) that ...

'...Allotment societies and plot-holders are unlikely to have expertise and resources available "in-house" to match either those of the local authority or, more significantly, the requirements of the task in hand'.

It could be that a national organisation such as the ADI could fulfill such a role. Or, the support role could be provided by a local agency.

Within the housing sector, as ALMOs and TMOs were established, training and support was provided to tenants by the housing associations. Forums were set up to share experiences and consult on plans. The tenant-led organisations were able to use their detailed knowledge of their communities to good effect, getting things done quickly and efficiently. Tenants appear satisfied with the service, and enjoy their new responsibilities. They choose the services they take on, and this can change over time. Most have a 30 year business plan (see www.nftmo.com and www.almos.org.uk). This process can guide allotments.

An issue for any association is what structure to choose (see www.unltd.org.uk and www.communitycompanies.co.uk). Traditionally, an association may just be an unincorporated body: it may have a constitution, but no existence in law apart from its members as individuals. Although simple to set up, this can leave the committee responsible for any debts, and is therefore considered risky if a wider range of duties is to be taken on. Other options are to become a company limited by guarantee - with limited liability for members and a legal identity of its own - or a registered charity, which can bring restrictions on trading, and must conform to charity regulations. Many associations formed as Independent & Provident Societies (IPS), considered by some to be rather out-dated. These work like co-operatives, with a minimum of 3 members, a separate legal identity and must conform to FSA requirements. Along with many allotment associations, most of Barnet's associations chose this structure, and it seems to be working for them. Finally, others have become Community Interest Companies (CIC), which can be for profit or not, though subject to certain legislation, but is considered particularly good modern alternative to an IPS for social enterprises.

5. Conclusion

To quote from Meeting the Challenge Together' - *The Third Sector Strategy for Wakefield district 2013-2016*:

'The landscape for public services across Wakefield district is shifting rapidly. Budget pressures, rising demand and changing public expectations mean local public services are being asked to do more with less.'

'The scale of the challenge means our public services cannot do this alone. Public servants must do more to leverage the capacity and resources of civil society to meet local needs and achieve better outcomes.'

A number of recommendations with the potential to improve allotment provision in the district have been made as a result of the findings of this study and these are listed in Appendix C.

Many of these suggestions are already successfully in use across other authorities and need little in resources, only the will of the Allotment Service in Wakefield to be implemented.

Others require the support and active involvement of allotment holders and, if they are to be fully engaged in helping support the running of the service, then a review of the recently introduced allotment policy, which has antagonised many plot holders, would seem advisable.

Anyone looking out from their plot must see that allotments across the country are once more at risk – if not from the developer then from a lack of investment.

A potential way forward for allotment holders in the district to counter this would be to establish a federation to support increased plot-holder management of their sites, building on the success of others like Leeds and Barnet who have 'been there' already.

For those who think this too much trouble a quote from Foley (2014[p209]) might help:

'Having delved into the history, I, for one, will never see allotments again in the same light. Remembering the struggle it took over centuries to win them makes them even more precious.'

We need allotments for the greater benefits they bring to physical and mental health, community spirit, integration and companionship or conversely, solitude and peace in a hectic world.

So - whatever your reason for loving your plot, get to it - the future of allotments in the Wakefield district is in your hands!!

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Appendix A

Summary of findings from Wakefield Council Allotment Site Surveys in October 2014

Site Name	Location	Secret any?	Associa tion?	Site by site plot information										Trading Post?	Toilet?	Plot to Standpipe ratio	Apex % of plots >25m from a standpipe *****	Fence Condition	Gate Condition	Unlocked on site?
				Full Plot	Half Plot	Qtr Plot	Unlet Plot	Over- grown +	Lost to list ++	Waiting list ***	As % of plots ****									
Cubyle Crescent Love Lane	Cubyle	Yes	No	5	12	0	0	0	0	6	33%			>5:1 & <10:1	60%	Good	Good	Yes		
Lumley Avenue	Castleford	Yes	No	30	0	0	0	0	0	17	57%			>10:1	50%	Terrible	Bad	Yes		
Back Garden Street	Castleford	Yes	N/A	73	2	0	0	0	11	4	5%			>10:1	20%	Bad	Good	Yes		
Redhill Avenue	Castleford	Yes	No	7	13	0	0	0	0	15	73%			>10:1	40%	Okay	Okay	Yes		
Three Lane Ends	Castleford	Yes	Yes	115	0	0	9	9	0	12	10%			>10:1	27%	Bad	Bad	Yes		
Three Lane End Pigeonies	Whitwood Mere	Yes	Yes	47	2	0	0	0	0	6	12%			<5:1	0%	No fence	Okay	Yes		
Westworth	Whitwood Mere	No	No	4	0	0	0	0	4	2	50%			No water	N/A	No fence	Plot gates	Yes		
Westwood Road	Castleford	Yes	No	44	0	0	0	0	0	10	23%			>5:1 & <10:1	5%	Okay	Okay	Yes		
Fryton Quarry	Castleford	N/A	No	33	0	0	10	10	0	3	9%			>10:1	33%	Terrible	Terrible	Yes		
Featherstone Green	Ferry Fynton	No	No	13	0	0	0	0	13	5	30%			No water	N/A	Terrible	Plot gates	Yes		
Gimhill Lane	Featherstone	No	No	11	8	0	2	0	0	12	63%			>5:1 & <10:1	0%	Okay	Okay	Yes		
Little Lane	Featherstone	Yes	No	48	4	0	3	3	0	5	10%			<5:1	0%	Good	Excellent	Yes		
Pontefract Road	Featherstone	No	No	30	0	0	2	2	14	11	37%			<5:1	0%	Terrible	Okay	Yes		
Poorfields	Featherstone	Yes	No	30	14	0	7	5	6	4	9%			>5:1 & <10:1	15%	Bad	Okay	Yes		
South View	Featherstone	No	No	30	0	0	0	0	2	6	20%			N/A	N/A	Okay	Good	Yes		
Vicarage Lane	Featherstone	Yes	No	41	1	0	0	0	1	17	40%			>5:1 & <10:1	7%	Terrible	Okay	Yes		
Wakefield Road	Featherstone	Yes	No	7	10	0	0	0	0	0	0%			<5:1	N/A	Bad	Plot gates	Yes		
West View	Featherstone	Yes	No	48	0	0	0	0	8	6	13%			<5:1	0%	Okay	Okay	Yes		
East Street	Featherstone	No	No	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0%			No water	N/A	Okay	Good	Yes		
Gemma Road South	Havercroft	No	No	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%			No water	N/A	No fence	No gate	N/A		
Green Lane	Horbury	N/A	N/A	6	0	0	0	0	0	9	150%			<5:1	0%	Bad	Okay	No		
Industrial Street	Horbury	Yes	No	49	18	0	2	0	0	6	9%			<5:1	0%	Bad	Excellent	Yes		
Manorfields	Horbury	Yes	No	52	0	0	2	2	0	3	6%			>5:1 & <10:1	0%	Terrible	Okay	Yes		
Sunroyd Hill	Horbury	No	No	4	0	0	0	0	4	3	75%			No water	N/A	Bad	Bad	Yes		
Mission Rooms	Horbury	No	No	10	0	0	0	0	0	7	70%			<5:1	0%	Good	Good	Yes		
Simpson Lane	Knottingsley	Yes	No	8	8	0	0	0	0	14	88%			<5:1	0%	Excellent	Excellent	Yes		
Womersley Road	Knottingsley	Yes	No	56	2	0	2	2	0	4	7%			>5:1 & <10:1	30%	Excellent	Good	Yes		
Dale Street	Knottingsley	Yes	No	12	6	0	0	0	0	5	26%			<5:1	20%	Bad	Okay	Yes		
Manor Grove	Couett	N/A	No	4	0	0	0	0	0	25	625%			<5:1	0%	Good	Good	No		
Park square	Couett	Yes	No	1	2	0	0	0	0	5	167%			<5:1	0%	Excellent	Excellent	No		
Queens Drive	Couett	Yes	No	5	15	0	0	0	0	23	115%			<5:1	15%	Okay	Good	No		
Abraham Lane	Couett	Yes	No	30	8	0	0	0	0	45	118%			>5:1 & <10:1	0%	Good	Good	No		
Denwell Terrace	Pontefract	Yes	No	33	2	0	0	0	0	18	51%			>5:1 & <10:1	0%	Bad	Good	Yes		
Hamwood Park	Pontefract	Yes	No	14	12	0	0	0	0	4	15%			>5:1 & <10:1	0%	Okay	Good	No		
	Pontefract	Yes	No	13	14	0	0	0	8	3	11%			>5:1 & <10:1	0%	Okay	Good	Yes		

Summary of findings from Wakefield Council Allotment Site Surveys in October 2014

Site Name	Location	Secret any?	Associa- tion?	Site by site plot information										Trading Post?	Toilet?	Plot to Standpipe ratio	Area % of plots >25m from a standpipe *****	Fence Condition	Gate Condition	Livestock on site?
				Full Plots		Half Plots	Qtr Plots	Unlet Plots	Over- grown	Lost	Waiting list	As % of plots ****								
				+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-							
Milhill	Pontefract	Yes	No	27	6	0	1	0	1	17	52%			<5:1	0%	Bad	Bad	Yes		
Moskhill Drive	Pontefract	Yes	No	17	0	0	0	0	4	9	53%			<5:1	0%	Bad	Terrible	Yes		
Rockhill Road	Pontefract	Yes	No	50	3	0	3	1	0	4	8%			>5:1 & <10:1	5%	Bad	Bad	Yes		
Wakefield Road	Pontefract	Yes	No	5	6	0	1	1	0	16	145%			<5:1	50%	Excellent	Excellent	Yes		
Ferry Lane	Stanley	N/A	No	19	0	0	0	0	7	18	95%			<5:1	15%	Okay	Good	Yes		
Fourth Avenue	Outwood	Yes	No	28	0	0	2	0	1	20	71%			<5:1	5%	Okay	Okay	Yes		
Lee Moor Lane	Stanley	No	No	7	0	0	0	0	7	12	171%			No water	N/A	Bad	No gate	Yes		
Stanley Grove	Stanley	Yes	No	15	0	0	0	0	0	12	92%			>5:1 & <10:1	50%	Bad	Bad	Yes		
Barnetts Road	Wakefield	Yes	Yes	8	18	4	0	0	1	5	17%			>10:1	33%	Terrible	Okay	Yes		
Beaconsfield	Agbrigg	No	No	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0%			No water	N/A	No fence	No gate	Yes		
Bench Avenue	Crofton	No	No	14	0	0	0	0	6	10	71%			No water	None	Terrible	Terrible	Yes		
Bowman Street	Agbrigg	Yes	No	20	0	0	0	0	0	1	5%			>5:1 & <10:1	25%	Okay	Bad	Yes		
Church View	Agbrigg	Yes	No	16	18	0	1	0	7	2	8%			>5:1 & <10:1	15%	Okay	Okay	Yes		
Cliverthorpe Grove	Sandall	Yes	No	10	2	0	1	0	0	14	117%			>10:1	50%	Okay	Good	No		
Dewsbury Road	Wakefield	Yes	Yes?	22	30	0	0	0	0	10	19%		Yes	>5:1 & <10:1	25%	Okay	Good	Yes		
Dunkirk Low Lane	Dunkirk	No	No	4	0	0	0	0	0	25	625%			<5:1	0%	Okay	Okay	Yes		
Hemdal Lane	Kettlethorpe	No	No	44	8	0	0	2	0	11	21%		Yes	>5:1 & <10:1	20%	Okay	Okay	Yes		
North Avenue	College Grove	Yes	Yes	42	2	0	1	0	0	6	14%		Yes	>5:1 & <10:1	0%	Okay	Bad	Yes		
Oakenshaw	Agbrigg	Yes	No	38	21	0	2	2	0	1	2%		Yes	<5:1	10%	Okay	Good	Yes		
Park Avenue	Thornes	Yes	No	22	8	0	0	0	0	11	37%			<5:1	0%	Okay	Good	Yes		
Park Lodge Lane	Eastbrook	Yes	Yes	94	18	0	6	3	0	8	7%		Yes	>10:1	20%	Okay	Good	Yes		
Quarry Dewsbury Road	Flintham	No	No	3	0	0	0	0	3	9	300%			No water	N/A	Terrible	Plot gates	Yes		
St Johns	St Johns	Yes	No	14	27	4	0	0	0	28	62%			<5:1	0%	Good	Good	Yes		
Woodcock Street	Belle Vue	Yes	No	77	8	0	0	0	0	0	0%		Yes	>10:1	7%	Excellent	Excellent	Yes		
Woolley Colliery	Woolley	No	No	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	200%			No water	N/A	Excellent	Excellent	Yes		
Totals				1509	308	8	57	42	110	587	51%									

Notes: Our best endeavours have been used to try to make sure this information is accurate but please accept our apologies if we have inadvertently included any incorrect information

* Plots which flood or are so overgrown they would be difficult for plot holders to bring back into use without assistance

** Lost to list i.e. paddocks, small holdings, pigeon lofts taking up full plot and plots absorbed into adjacent gardens.

*** Waiting list figures as at 18th November 2014

**** Waiting list as a percentage of plots/half plots/quarter plots on site after deduction of overgrown and lost to list plots

***** Ratio of plots on site to water standpipes on site

***** Approximate percentage of plots on site which are more than 25 metres from a standpipe to the edge of the plot

Appendix B



Allotment Holders Survey Results

Question (number of respondents)	Answers	Wakefield Council %	Normanton Town Council %	Hemsworth Town Council %	Combined %
About Plot Holders					
Age range (196)	Under 16 years	0%	0%	0%	0%
	16 to 24 years old	1%	0%	0%	1%
	25 to 34 years old	6%	0%	3%	5%
	35 to 44 years old	11%	6%	8%	10%
	45 to 54 years old	14%	17%	26%	16%
	55 to 64 years old	29%	33%	26%	29%
	65 + years old	39%	44%	37%	39%
Gender (196)	Male	69%	81%	78%	72%
	Female	31%	19%	22%	28%
Employment Status (197)	Unemployed	5%	0%	3%	4%
	Self employed	6%	0%	0%	5%
	Employed	30%	39%	26%	30%
	Long term sick	2%	0%	5%	2%
	Retired	55%	56%	53%	55%
	Prefer not to say	2%	5%	13%	4%
How many other people work your plot with you? (196)	0	32%	44%	37%	34%
	1	56%	50%	50%	54%
	2	4%	6%	3%	4%
	3	3%	0%	8%	4%
	4	2%	0%	0%	2%
	5+	2%	0%	2%	2%
What were your main reasons for taking on an allotment plot? (196)	For the exercise	47%	61%	50%	49%
	To save money	22%	11%	30%	22%
	Leisure activity	35%	56%	53%	40%
	Grow healthy food	68%	72%	55%	66%
	I enjoy growing/gardening	85%	73%	61%	79%
	To keep livestock	19%	17%	50%	24%
	To get out of the house	27%	17%	32%	27%
	To socialise	29%	39%	39%	32%

Question	Answers	Wakefield Council %	Normanton Town Council %	Hemsworth Town Council %	Combined %
About Your Plot					
How near do you live to your plot? (194)	Less than ½ mile	54%	89%	61%	59%
	½ to 1 mile	24%	11%	28%	23%
	1 to 5 miles	22%	0%	11%	18%
	Over 5 miles	0%	0%	0%	0%
How do you usually get to your plot? (195)	Motor vehicle	42%	25%	38%	39%
	Public Transport	1%	0%	0%	1%
	Walk	55%	69%	59%	57%
	Cycle	2%	6%	3%	3%
Is this the nearest allotment site to your home? (195)	Yes	74%	89%	92%	78%
	No	24%	11%	8%	22%
Was this your first choice site? (160)	Yes	90%	91%	94%	91%
	No	10%	90%	6%	9%
How long have you had your plot? (195)	Less than 6 months	4%	11%	7%	5%
	6 months to 1 year	6%	0%	0%	4%
	1 year to 5 years	29%	22%	31%	28%
	5 to 10 years	24%	28%	8%	22%
	10 years to 15 years	11%	11%	16%	12%
	15 years to 20 years	4%	22%	14%	8%
	Over 20 years	22%	6%	24%	21%
On average how many hours a week do you spend on your plot? (192)	Less than 2 hours	2%	0%	3%	2%
	3 to 8 hours	35%	33%	19%	32%
	9 to 16 hours	29%	17%	44%	30%
	17 to 24 hours	18%	28%	14%	18%
	25 to 32 hours	7%	17%	3%	7%
	33 to 40 hours	7%	0%	3%	6%
	Over 40 hours	2%	5%	14%	5%
When are you mainly on your plot? (175) (167)	Weekdays	13%	3%	6%	11%
	Weekends	12%	22%	9%	12%
	Both	75%	75%	85%	77%
	Mornings	22%	25%	26%	23%
	Afternoons	19%	11%	16%	18%
	Evenings	10%	15%	4%	9%
	All three	49%	50%	54%	50%
How long were you waiting for your plot? (182)	Less than 6 months	60%	39%	78%	61%
	6 months to 1 year	16%	39%	17%	19%
	1 year to 5 years	20%	22%	5%	17%
	Over 5 years	4%	0%	0%	3%

Question	Answers	Wakefield Council %	Normanton Town Council %	Hemsworth Town Council %	Combined %
Communication					
Have you read your site's allotment policy?(167)	Yes	60%	64%	70%	62%
	No	40%	36%	30%	38%
Have you read your site's allotment handbook?(124)	Yes	23%	N/A	N/A	N/A
	No	77%	N/A	N/A	N/A
Have you ever received a plot warning letter from your allotment service?(195)	Yes	23%	17%	47%	27%
	No	7%	83%	50%	72%
	Don't know	0%	0%	3%	1%
Did you feel it was deserved? (56)	Yes	11%	0%	0%	7%
	No	78%	100%	100%	86%
	Don't know	11%	0%	0%	7%
Have you ever phoned your allotment service?(189)	Yes	58%	29%	43%	52%
	No	42%	71%	54%	47%
	Don't know	0%	0%	3%	1%
How quickly did you get through? (94)	First time	36%	25%	71%	41%
	After a few attempts	53%	50%	21%	48%
	Gave up	7%	25%	8%	7%
	Can't remember	4%	0%	0%	4%
Have you ever met your allotment officer? (192)	Yes	45%	76%	53%	49%
	No	52%	17%	41%	47%
	Don't know	3%	6%	6%	4%
Have you ever met your site's representative? (148)	Yes	86%	91%	84%	86%
	No	6%	9%	12%	5%
	Don't know	6%	0%	4%	7%
	We don't have one	2%	0%	0%	2%

Plot Inspections					
How often do you think plot inspections are needed? (188)	Never	10%	0%	9%	9%
	Every 3 months	27%	22%	73%	31%
	Every 6 months	32%	45%	12%	33%
	Every 12 months	31%	33%	6%	27%

Question	Answers	Wakefield Council %	Normanton Town Council %	Hemsworth Town Council %	Combined %
Given the choice, who do you think should carry out inspections? (187)	Site rep	35%	17%	27%	32%
	Site committee	19%	42%	31%	23%
	Allotment officer	34%	28%	21%	31%
	Allotment holders	12%	13%	21%	14%
Do you think your allotment officer has enough growing experience to enable them to inspect plots fairly? (189)	Yes	24%	33%	14%	23%
	No	20%	22%	39%	24%
	Don't know	56%	45%	47%	53%

Plot Management					
What range of plot sizes do you think your site should have? (189)	Full plots	90%	100%	91%	91%
	Half plots	57%	39%	39%	52%
	Quarter plots	12%	6%	12%	12%
	Mini plots for beginners	20%	6%	21%	19%
Do you think unauthorised sub-letting or sharing of plots takes place on your site? (194)	Never	31%	28%	30%	30%
	Occasionally	6%	6%	14%	8%
	Regularly	26%	6%	14%	22%
	Don't know	37%	60%	42%	40%
Do you think plots should be able to be passed over to people other than close relatives? (193)	Yes	33%	33%	41%	35%
	No	38%	22%	14%	32%
	Possibly after an agreed period of sharing the plot	29%	45%	45%	33%
Have you experienced problems with untended / unallocated plots setting weeds/ seeds etc into your plot? (196)	Yes	67%	33%	89%	68%
	No	33%	67%	11%	32%

Plot Allocation					
Was your plot in good condition when you were allocated it? (194)	Yes	23%	28%	13%	22%
	No	74%	72%	87%	76%
	Don't remember	3%	0%	0%	2%

Question	Answers	Wakefield Council %	Normanton Town Council %	Hemsworth Town Council %	Combined %
Was your plot clear of structures and rubbish when you were allocated it?(194)	Yes	21%	28%	11%	20%
	No	77%	72%	89%	79%
	Don't remember	1%	0%	0%	1%
Were you asked if you wanted fences /structures removed before taking the plot?(194)	Yes	3%	6%	5%	4%
	No	94%	94%	95%	94%
	Don't remember	3%	0%	0%	2%
Did you have any fences / structures removed by the Council?(195)	Yes	1%	0%	3%	1%
	No	98%	100%	97%	98%
	Don't remember	1%	0%	0%	1%
Did you have to remove /burn any yourself?(194)	Yes	64%	67%	82%	68%
	No	33%	33%	16%	29%
	Don't remember	3%	0%	2%	3%

Livestock					
Is livestock currently allowed on your site? (192)	Yes	79%	94%	97%	84%
	No	15%	6%	3%	11%
	Don't know	6%	0%	0%	5%
If not would you like it to be? (28)	Yes	8%	0%	100%	7%
	No	29%	100%	0%	71%
	Don't know	63%	0%	0%	22%
Do you agree with the District Council's livestock policy on some sites of only allowing 8 hens and 8 rabbits to be kept by each plot holder?(191)	Yes	37%	50%	5%	32%
	No	44%	6%	92%	50%
	No opinion	19%	44%	3%	18%
What livestock, if any, do you / would you like to keep? (120)	Hens	56%	80%	83%	63%
	Rabbits	19%	20%	50%	25%
	Ducks/geese	26%	20%	63%	33%
	Goats	13%	0%	0%	9%
	Pigs	13%	0%	42%	18%
	Beehives	33%	0%	42%	32%
	Other	18%	20%	21%	26%

Question	Answers	Wakefield Council %	Normanton Town Council %	Hemsworth Town Council %	Combined %
Site Rules					
Do you think fruit and nut trees should be allowed to be grown on plots?(190)	Never	2%	78%	65%	2%
	With a height restriction	68%	22%	35%	68%
	Unrestricted	30%	0%	0%	30%
Do you think you should be allowed to sell your surplus produce?(185)	Yes	47%	38%	73%	52%
	No	30%	44%	11%	27%
	Only through a site trading post	23%	18%	16%	21%
Are the fences between you and your neighbours plots commercially produced?(191)	Yes	10%	56%	16%	10%
	No	51%	44%	84%	58%
	Don't have any	39%	0%	0%	32%
Do you think they should have to be?(97)	Yes	19%	25%	19%	20%
	No	81%	75%	81%	80%
Are any sheds or shelters on your plot commercially produced?(184)	Yes	44%	53%	24%	41%
	No	47%	47%	73%	52%
	Don't have any	9%	0%	3%	7%
Do you think they should have to be?(105)	Yes	27%	0%	10%	21%
	No	73%	100%	90%	79%
Could you have afforded to buy equivalent commercial fences and sheds if the rules had banned homemade structures?(180)	Yes	20%	28%	11%	19%
	No	64%	56%	81%	67%
	Possibly	16%	16%	8%	14%
Do you have a greenhouse on your plot and if so what size is it? (189)	No	40%	17%	29%	35%
	6' x 4'	6%	17%	13%	8%
	6' x 6'	6%	17%	3%	6%
	6'x 8'	23%	22%	29%	24%
	8'x 4'	3%	3%	3%	3%
	8'x 8'	1%	6%	0%	1%
	10' x 4'	1%	0%	0%	1%
	10 'x 6'	4%	8%	0%	3%
	10 'x 8'	9%	0%	15%	9%
	Larger	8%	10%	9%	9%

Question	Answers	Wakefield Council %	Normanton Town Council %	Hemsworth Town Council %	Combined %
Do you have a poly-tunnel on your plot and if so what size is it? (184)	No	88%	75%	94%	89%
	6' x 4'	0%	0%	0%	0%
	6' x 6'	0%	0%	0%	0%
	6' x 8'	2%	0%	0%	1%
	8' x 4'	2%	0%	0%	1%
	8' x 8'	1%	0%	0%	1%
	10' x 4'	1%	0%	0%	1%
	10' x 6'	1%	0%	0%	1%
	10' x 8'	2%	0%	0%	1%
	Larger	3%	25%	6%	5%

At what times of the week do you think use of strimmers / rotavators etc should be allowed? (180) (170)	Weekdays				
	Not before 8 am	35%	44%	53%	39%
	Not before 9 am	36%	44%	26%	35%
	Not before 10 am	13%	6%	9%	12%
	Not after 6 pm	16%	31%	6%	16%
	Not after 7 pm	20%	31%	15%	20%
	Not after 8 pm	30%	13%	29%	28%
	Anytime	8%	0%	12%	8%
	Not at all	2%	0%	0%	2%
	Weekends				
	Not before 8 am	23%	14%	42%	26%
	Not before 9 am	34%	57%	29%	35%
	Not before 10 am	26%	29%	13%	24%
	Not after 6 pm	20%	43%	10%	20%
	Not after 7 pm	17%	21%	19%	18%
	Not after 8 pm	28%	21%	32%	28%
	Anytime	8%	0%	13%	8%
	Not at all	4%	0%	0%	3%

Plot Charges					
Do you think that the new Council rent rate for 2015 of 22.5 pence per square metre is: (132)	Cheap	1%	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Fair	61%	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Expensive	38%	N/A	N/A	N/A
Are you entitled to receive a concession on your plot fees? (168)	Yes but I don't claim it	4%	N/A	0%	3%
	No	51%	N/A	64%	58%
	Yes	45%	N/A	36%	39%
Do you think the amount you pay for water rates is fair? (174)	Yes	57%	60%	50%	56%
	No	42%	40%	50%	43%
	No water on site	1%	0%	0%	1%

Question	Answers	Wakefield Council %	Normanton Town Council %	Hemsworth Town Council %	Combined %
Do you think each allotment site should be metered separately to encourage water rationing and reduce bills?(188)	Yes	40%	47%	38%	40%
	No	48%	41%	41%	46%
	Don't know	12%	12%	21%	14%
Have you seen any improvements since £65k budget was approved in Nov 2013? (129)	Yes	12%	N/A	N/A	N/A
	No	88%	N/A	N/A	N/A

Site Improvements					
What are the top 5 improvements most needed on your site? (189)	Quicker terminations	31%	12%	47%	33%
	Quicker allocations	38%	6%	71%	42%
	Quicker repairs to pipes/taps	22%	12%	5%	17%
	Repairs to boundary fences	40%	71%	13%	37%
	More taps on site	21%	41%	24%	23%
	Smaller plot sizes	7%	0%	24%	10%
	Disposing of rubbish	72%	53%	68%	70%
	Better quality inspections	18%	17%	21%	19%
	Toilets on site	37%	47%	16%	34%
	Water on site	2%	6%	11%	4%
	Clearing of overgrown plots	54%	17%	79%	56%
	Pest control	48%	53%	29%	44%
	Clearance of poor quality fences / structures	22%	47%	24%	24%
	Other	7%	6%	5%	6%

Allotment Associations					
Does your site currently have an Association?(192)	Yes	11%	39%	46%	20%
	No	74%	33%	46%	65%
	Don't know	15%	28%	8%	15%
If so, are you a member?(35)	Yes	86%	83%	93%	89%
	No	14%	17%	7%	11%

Question	Answers	Wakefield Council %	Normanton Town Council %	Hemsworth Town Council %	Combined %
If you do not currently have an Association then do you think your site would benefit from having one?(156)	Yes	58%	67%	63%	60%
	No	16%	0%	17%	15%
	Don't know	26%	33%	20%	25%
Would you join an association if there was one?(165)	Yes	60%	72%	78%	64%
	No	10%	14%	11%	10%
	Possibly	30%	14%	11%	26%
What would you like any association on your site to be able to do? (154)	Allocate plots	48%	53%	77%	55%
	Terminate plots	43%	23%	74%	47%
	Collect plot fees	22%	31%	52%	29%
	Run a trading post	40%	15%	39%	38%
	Rent out strimmers / rotavators etc	40%	23%	32%	37%
	Receive a share of plot fees to maintain and improve your site	57%	23%	45%	52%
	Arrange social events	31%	15%	35%	31%
	Apply for funding to improve your site	68%	69%	55%	66%
	Carry out plot inspections	45%	23%	45%	44%
Does your site have a committee? (186)	Yes	16%	100%	12%	24%
	No	72%	0%	73%	65%
	Don't know	12%	0%	15%	11%
Does your site have a site rep? (180)	Yes	73%	72%	66%	72%
	No	10%	11%	23%	13%
	Don't know	17%	17%	11%	15%
Are you already, or would you be interested in being, one of the following? (71)	Site secretary	38%	36%	50%	39%
	Chairperson	19%	9%	25%	18%
	Site rep	31%	18%	42%	31%
	Treasurer	21%	27%	42%	25%
	Vice Chair	10%	0%	25%	11%
	New growers mentor	27%	10%	42%	27%
Do you already, or would you be interested in, helping to maintain your site?(173)	Yes	54%	59%	73%	58%
	No	9%	6%	8%	9%
	Possibly	37%	35%	19%	33%

Question	Answers	Wakefield Council %	Normanton Town Council %	Hemsworth Town Council %	Combined %
What would be most likely to encourage you to consider helping run your site? (117)	Training and support	19%	27%	20%	20%
	Being paid for the role	7%	0%	0%	5%
	Being given a free plot	19%	27%	4%	16%
	More easily enforceable allotment rules	37%	64%	36%	39%
	Being part of a site association	29%	0%	34%	27%
	Being part of a site committee	34%	9%	58%	37%
	Other	5%	0%	4%	4%

Allotment Networks					
Would you like to see an Allotment Gardeners Federation set up to represent / defend the interests of allotment holders across the Wakefield District? (184)	Yes	69%	56%	91%	72%
	No	8%	17%	9%	7%
	Possibly	22%	28%	0%	21%
Would you be happy to get involved if there was one? (180)	Yes	38%	31%	47%	39%
	No	21%	31%	9%	19%
	Possibly	41%	38%	44%	42%
If you are an existing rep / secretary / treasurer / chair would you be happy to help support someone from another site taking on one of these roles for the first time? (65)	Yes	36%	57%	82%	46%
	No	28%	43%	18%	25%
	Possibly	36%	0%	0%	29%

Appendix C Recommendations to Wakefield District Council's Allotment Service

%age	Finding from feedback / surveys/ areas for concern	Recommendation
40%	Haven't read WMDC allotment policy.	Add details of where policies and handbooks can be downloaded to all correspondence. Provide copies to all council libraries
77%	Haven't read WMDC allotment handbook.	
23%	Have received a plot warning letter.	Policy on when to issue warning letters needs reviewing as plot holders feel too many unwarranted letters are being sent out.
78%	% age of respondents who didn't feel warning letter was deserved.	
60%	% age of respondents who had to make a few attempts or gave up when trying to contact the service by phone.	Improved system of answering and responding to calls required.
62%	% age of respondents who felt that a fair system of passing plots on to someone other than a close relative should be considered.	Adopt and communicate a succession policy which allows sharers to take over a plot if they have reached the top of a waiting list when the plot is given up.
19%	% age of respondents who quoted keeping livestock as one of their main reasons for taking on an allotment.	Individual sites to be designated livestock or non livestock sites. Numbers and types of livestock allowed on sites to be reviewed in light of plot holder's feedback.
50%	Plot holders who didn't agree with the council's new policy on livestock.	
20%	Percentage of respondents who would like to keep bees on their plot.	Allotment policy to be reviewed and rules for allowance of beekeeping on site included.
98%	%age of respondents who disagree with allotment policy not allowing trees on site.	Allotment policy to be changed to allow new fruit and nut trees up to a certain height / on a semi dwarfing rootstock.
81%	% age of respondents who disagree with allotment service policy on non commercial fences.	Allotment policy to be changed to allow non commercially produced fences. Clarity on which sites are required to be fence free required.
73%	6%age of respondents who disagree with allotment service policy on non commercial buildings.	Allotment policy to be changed to allow non commercially produced buildings.
44%	% age of poly-tunnels larger than allowed by allotment policy.	Allotment policy to be changed to allow larger poly-tunnels to be installed without permission as they are generally bigger than greenhouses.
4%	% age of respondents who agree with allotment policy banning use of strimmers/rotavators at weekends.	Policy to be revised to allow use of strimmers and rotavators at weekends between 10 am and 6 pm.
88%	% age of respondents who have seen no sign of any of the £65K improvement budget being spent on their site since it was approved in November 2013.	More transparency over what is spent each year improving and maintaining allotment sites across the district. Details published on line annually on the allotment service web page.
67%	% age of respondents who had experienced problems with untended or unallocated plots setting weed seeds onto their own.	Introduce a 6 month probationary period for plot holders before they are given their full plot agreement in order to reduce problems with unsuitable tenants plot blocking.
		Write to all on waiting list each year asking them to return a form if they wish to remain on the waiting list.
58%	% age of respondents who thought their site would benefit from having an association.	Self help pack required to make setting up their own association easier for sites that are interested.

60%	% age of respondents who would join a site association if there was one.	
63%	% age of respondents who would be more likely to help run their site if there was an association or committee on site.	
54%	% age of respondents who would possibly be willing to help maintain their site.	
66%	% age of respondents who didn't feel that the allotment officer was the best person to carry out plot inspections.	Site associations to be offered a percentage of plot fees in return for carrying out their own site inspections and terminations. Monies to be used on sites chosen improvements.
72%	% age of respondents including clearance of rubbish in the top 5 improvements needed on their site.	
48%	% age of respondents including pest control in the top 5 improvements needed on their site.	
40%	% age of respondents including repairs to fences in the top 5 improvements needed on their site.	
54%	% age of respondents including clearance of overgrown plots in the top 5 improvements needed on their site.	
69%	% age of respondents including quicker allocations / terminations in the top 5 improvements needed on their site.	
	Many plot holders were unhappy with the lack of accountability of site representatives and the council's refusal to change reps when requested by plot holders.	
69%	% age of respondents who would definitely like to see an allotment federation set up to represent allotment holders in the Wakefield district.	Council to provide support to help set up of an allotment federation for the district.
24%	% age of respondents who would possibly like to see an allotment federation set up to represent allotment holders in the Wakefield district.	
7	Number of sites where over 30% of plots are more than 25 metres from a standpipe.	Instigate programme of improvements to increase number of standpipes on sites identified.
42	Number of overgrown plots across allotment portfolio.	Instigate programme of reclamation to bring these plots back into use as soon as possible.
31%	Number of people on waiting list as a percentage of total "available" council plots after deduction of overgrown and lost to list plots i.e. one person waiting for every 3 plots "available".	Allotment service website should be used to publicise number of plots on each site and numbers on waiting list to give potential applicants a better idea of availability across the district. Beaconsfield should be removed from the list if it is unavailable to applicants.
	Beaconsfield -Agbrigg, is listed on the council allotment site but is overgrown and not in use as an allotment site.	

	Havercroft - East Street, Wakefield - Lincoln Street - Balne Lane, Cliff Road - Crigglestone, South Elmsall - Albany Crescent, Upton - Harewood Lane and Upton - School Road, and Primrose Hill - Eastmoor are all shown on the allotment service website allotment map but are no longer in use as allotment sites despite not being used for any other purpose.	Consideration should be given to re-opening some sites to deal with the obvious demand for new plots.
	Pontefract - Farthing Avenue and Pontefract - East Hardwick are both in use as allotment sites but are not available on the allotment service website for anyone to add their name to the waiting list.	Sites details should be added to the website.